
MAGNIFICENT

Day 1: HANOI

Welcome to Vietnam! Once you're through immigration, you'll be met by one of our friendly team and you'll transfer directly to the hotel.

Tonight, get to know the group over dinner for the first catch-up – at one of our favourite local restaurants, of course!

ACCOMMODATION: GM Premium Hotel – Deluxe room (or similar)

INCLUDED: Dinner

Day 2: THE OLD QUARTER

Early mornings in Hanoi are all about makeshift market stalls and boisterous coffee houses. So, let's skip the hotel breakfast and fill up on crusty baguettes stuffed with fresh ingredients, as you explore Hanoi like a local with your guide. Here's a tip! Try the local (Vietnamese recipe) iced coffee, or the egg coffee if you dare – these are unique to Vietnam.

Hanoi's Old Quarter has been around for more than 1000 years, and while you wander along its cobblestone lanes today, you'll catch the heady scent of incense wafting from ancestral temples, and come to understand how the city's many cultural incarnations contribute to its eclectic charm. Wrap up the day over a relaxing drink in a neighbourhood Bia Hoi, or Beerhall.

But what about the trains, you're asking? Fret not! The day also includes your first ride on a local train, departing Hanoi Station for Long Bien Bridge, via train street!

ACCOMMODATION: GM Premium Hotel – Deluxe room (or similar)

INCLUDED: Breakfast and Lunch



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Day 3: LAN HA BAY

Cruising on Halong Bay is on plenty of traveller's bucket lists. But have you heard of Lan Ha Bay? It's remote compared to its celebrity neighbour, has scenery that is just as jaw-dropping, and best of all, none of the tourist hordes!

You'll transfer by road after breakfast and set sail by lunchtime on The Heritage Cruise. Join in with the deserted-beach and water-cave excursions, make use of the onboard kayaks, or just relax on your cabin's private balcony, cocktail in hand, watching the sun set over the Gulf of Tonkin.

ACCOMMODATION: Heritage Cruise - Ocean Cabin

INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4: LAN HA BAY AND NINH BINH

Early risers can join the Vovinam (Vietnam's martial arts) class on the sundeck. Then jump aboard a traditional rowboat to go into the Light and Dark Cave. You'll glide through the cave's opening which is framed by fig trees and orchids, and into its silent darkness, only to be bathed in light once more when you pop out the other side and into the hidden lagoon.

After Brunch, it's time to say your goodbyes to the Heritage crew and reunite with your guide and driver for the last road transfer of the trip. Destination: Ninh Binh. Usually only on the radar of intrepid travellers, this place is not just off-the-beaten-path, the scenery is off-the-charts, and we didn't want you to miss out. Following check-in and a relax, there'll be time enough for a tranquil rowboat tour through the Van Long Nature Reserve.

Tonight is a low-key one, with dinner at the hotel. Our first major train journey is tomorrow night. Are you ready?

ACCOMMODATION: Emeralda Ninh Binh resort, Superior room

INCLUDED: Light Breakfast, Brunch and Dinner



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Day 5: NINH BINH

We don't usually bandy around overdone tour brochure words like 'spectacular', but when it comes to the UNESCO Heritage listed Trang An Complex, it's hard to avoid it! You'll be awed into silence this morning as you travel by boat along the submerged valleys surrounded by towering limestone peaks. Then, from boat to bicycle, you'll tour Hoa Lu, Vietnam's capital back in the 10th century. Don't worry - the cycling is flat, easy, and slow paced - but if you're still not convinced it's for you, we've arranged a vehicle backup too.

After a local restaurant lunch, Mua Cave is on the agenda. However, if you're not fussed about taking the 500 stairs to the top of the mountain, for ooh-and-ahh making views, you can choose to pop back to the resort and enjoy its tranquillity. You'll all catch up again when the group heads out to a local restaurant for dinner.

Day 5.5: OVERNIGHT TRAIN TO DONG HOI

We've arranged an evening checkout, then it's All Aboard your first ride on Vietnam's Reunification Express. The train is scheduled to depart Ninh Binh Railway Station at 9:44pm. Yep - your first long-haul train ride is a sleeper! They're 4 berthed shared compartments with toilets at the end of the carriage. Now, can you see why we kept you so busy today? You'll sleep well tonight!

ACCOMMODATION: Overnight train

INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



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Day 6: PHONG NHA

The train should pull into Dong Hoi Station around 6am and your room will already be prepared for you at the Lake House. Take a rest, and breakfast at your leisure, before regrouping later to visit Phong Nha Cave. As the riverboat chugs along the Son River, you'll be forgiven for thinking you've stepped back in time. This prehistoric-like landscape is backdrop-perfection to riverside villages barely changed in centuries. And the sound of children playing on the riverbank will joyfully echo in your memory long after you're back at home.

The entrance to the cave is literally a hole at the base of a towering limestone cliff and your boat will glide right on through. The underground river system stretches for kilometres, but your boat will moor, so you can tread the boardwalk to be closer to the ancient stalactite and rock formations.

Then, back to the Lake House – be sure to use some of your leisure time later today relaxing on your private lakeside balcony.

ACCOMMODATION: Phong Nha Lake House, Bungalow with lake view

INCLUDED: Breakfast

Day 7: HUE

Today's train to Hue is a three-hour soft-seat ride. These trains aren't known for their punctuality, and there's nothing further planned today except check-in and, of course, dinner – so why not say hi to some local fellow travellers and sit back and enjoy the ride.

Did somebody mention dinner?

Vietnamese food is to Hue, like Pizza is to Naples – it's the traditional home of much of Vietnam's deliciousness. So tonight, we've planned our favourite food tour of all! What an enjoyable rush as your cyclo-driver skilfully manoeuvres his rickshaw along tiny alleyways to the best street-food venues in town! Your tastebuds will do a merry dance trying treats like Hue's crispy savoury pancakes and for your sweet tooth, the sweet soups are surprisingly delicious.

ACCOMMODATION: Hue Riverside Boutique resort, Deluxe River view room

INCLUDED: Breakfast box and Dinner



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Day 8: HUE

Come out today to see Hue through the eyes of a local. Your neighbourhood guide will share childhood stories about life during the war and intimate family history as you're led down side-streets abuzz with local life. Then travel by boat to a riverside village whose families have created bronze pieces since the 1500s.

Why stay overnight in the city when there's a beautiful hotel within clear sight of the Perfume River in a nearby village? Thuy Bieu is a local delight and while some tourists visit it for a glimpse of village life during the day, it's home for you and just a few others in the evenings. So, be sure to wander the tree-lined paths to the sounds of chattering children as families settle in for the evening. Dinner is at your leisure.

ACCOMMODATION: Hue Riverside Boutique resort, Deluxe River view room
INCLUDED: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 9: HOI AN

The train leaves for Da Nang at 9am. The soft-seat trip should only take around 2 ½ hours, but gazing out the window as the train crawls along Hai Van Pass - coastline drama to your left, mountains to your right - you'll be hoping that time slows. Not surprisingly, this part of the journey features regularly in those '10 best' travel lists we all read. Train trip finished, Hoi An is a 45-minute road transfer from Da Nang Station.

Hoi An. Yes, it's a tourist hotspot. It's also a must see, so we've made sure your experience is not a generic one. But first, you need to see what everyone else comes for, and on this afternoon's walking tour of the old town, you'll discover why its UNESCO Heritage status is well deserved.

ACCOMMODATION: Allegro Hoi An resort, Junior Suite room
INCLUDED: Breakfast and Dinner



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Day 10: HOI AN

By now your love for Vietnamese food will be an obsession and today you can nurture that along even more! The group will head out on bicycles to follow a food trail – from farm to plate. (Again, it's an easy ride, but you're welcome to travel by car.) You'll meet friendly market stallholders selling local ingredients and farmers who grow them just nearby. At the end, you'll connect with your chef, learn about cooking, and get to share the spoils over lunch. No previous cooking experience required!

The remainder of the day is at your leisure. Spend it in your splendid accommodation or wander through the old town. It's user friendly – there's even an Irish Pub if you're feeling like a change of scene!

ACCOMMODATION: Allegro Hoi An resort, Junior Suite room

INCLUDED: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 11: THE VIETAGE LUXURY CARRIAGE TO QUY NHON

There's an early checkout and breakfast is served in a box, but that's of no consequence today, because for the rest of the day, you'll be travelling in luxury. The Vietage carriage departs with the southbound Unification Express from Da Nang at 8am, and your group will have it all to yourselves – a fitting finale to your train rides!

Once onboard, you're welcome to sit at the bar – for a specialty coffee, of course! Or settle into your window seat and watch central Vietnam amble by outside. Keep an eye out for the ruins of the Hindu Champa Kingdom from the 4th century. There's lunch onboard too, but not just any old lunch. Today it's first-class all the way!

Your journey ends at the up-and-coming resort town of Quy Nhon. There are views of the private beach from your studio's balcony and there's clifftop dining at the resort tonight.

ACCOMMODATION: Avani Quy Nhon resort, Avani Deluxe Studio Room

INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



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Day 12: QUY NHON

Fancy a lie-in today? Your deluxe studio is just divine and you're welcome to savour it for a while. In the afternoon the group will meet up for a tour around the district. Ancient buildings like the one you spotted from the train yesterday are scattered around the landscape and they're known as Cham Towers. Built at least 1,000 years ago, some are still visited for worshipping today.

Wrap up the day with dinner at a local restaurant. The seafood is so fresh here!

ACCOMMODATION: Avani Quy Nhon resort, Avani Deluxe Studio Room

INCLUDED: Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13: HO CHI MINH CITY (SAIGON)

You're out the door after breakfast to catch your flight to Ho Chi Min City. Why fly this leg, I hear you ask? (How dare we avoid the train!) Well, the reason turns out to be simple: there's just not a lot to see along the way. And it would be a non-stop, arduous, 13-or-more-hour stint on a train that's at the untidy end of a very long journey.

After the laidback countryside, you'll instantly feel the big-city energy of Ho Chi Min. It's the business heart that drives the nation, but it has its traditional neighbourhoods too, if you know where to look. Check into your hotel and head out to explore with your guide. Stops include The War Museum and Saigon Railway Station. We'd like to say we've arranged a ride on Ho Chi Min City's brand-new subway line, but completion dates have been set and reset since 2018, so let's just wait and see. Tonight, you're off to a unique cultural performance at the Saigon Opera House!

ACCOMMODATION: Hotel Des Arts, Deluxe room

INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



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Day 14: CU CHI TUNNELS

We've all heard about the tunnels built by Vietnamese guerrillas during Vietnam's wars for Independence and Reunification, but to see them first-hand will take your appreciation for their ingenuity to a different level - especially when you see the smokeless kitchen, designed by an army chef back in 1951. Spending a little time underground in the tunnels will give you more insight into wartime survival in Vietnam.

After lunch, the group will head back to Ho Chi Min and the rest of the afternoon is for your choosing. Why not watch the sunset over the city, cocktail in hand, on the terrace of a nearby rooftop bar. Turtle Park is just a short stroll from the hotel too, which livens up each night when locals flock to the pop-up street-food stalls.

ACCOMMODATION: Hotel Des Arts, Deluxe room

INCLUDED: Breakfast and Lunch

Day 15: THE MEKONG DELTA

The saddest part of today is when you wake up and realise that you have just one full day remaining. But that one day will be lived to the fullest!

The tentacles of the Mekong's River Delta reach all the way to the city and you'll travel along one into the heart of the Delta today. Your boat chugs along while daily life in the south unfolds before you - like a movie with an artistically-perfected film set. As your boat draws into the bank along the way, and later when you travel by bicycle or rickshaw, you too will find yourself in that movie scene - meeting with workers and farmers who openly share with you about their lives. The adventure then finishes by row-boat along a palm-lined canal - a most quintessential jungle experience to reach your lunch spot!

There's enough time this afternoon for packing your case and preparing for dinner. And what a farewell it will be - as dear friends, you will dine at Vietnam House - a restaurant founded by Australian born celebrity chef Luke Nguyen, of the famed Red Lantern Restaurant in Sydney!

ACCOMMODATION: Hotel Des Arts, Deluxe room

INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



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Day 16: FAREWELL FRIENDS

Swap numbers and emails at breakfast, for it's time to farewell friends. Your airport transfer is included, and your driver will pick you up 3 hours before your flight departure. Hotel checkout is at noon.

INCLUDED: Breakfast

